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ABSTRACT

The Pegasus Project offered nine gifted hearing impaired students (11-15 years old) a summer enrichment experience with hearing peers. Courses included computer programming, literature, fine arts, physical and biological sciences, math enrichment, and sign language. All hearing impaired students also attended a special class on issues for the hearing impaired; this course explored deaf history, considered traits of productive deaf adults, and considered other relevant issues in the field of hearing impairment. Opportunities were provided for integration between hearing impaired and hearing students. The program was viewed by staff, students, and parents as highly successful, with a good level of interaction and acceptance among students. Hearing impaired students were found to need additional work in written language. (CL)

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PEGASUS PROJECT FOR THE HEARING-IMPAIRED

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Background

Programs for gifted hearing-impaired students have not been numerous. In addition, during the past ten years, trends in schools and programs for the hearing-impaired toward increased use of manual communication in general and manual English codes in particular, coupled with more numerous preschool and parent education programs, have resulted in an increasing number of hearing-impaired students with English skills that are equal to hearing children. Many of these students are in day schools, day classes, or mainstreamed programs, and consequently have sometimes had limited contact with other hearing-impaired students with similar English skills.

In an attempt to address this problem, exploratory discussions were begun with Lorraine Bostick and Laura Katz, Directors of Pegasus Programs for gifted hearing students, located in Orange County, California, at the University of California Irvine (UCI) campus. This program sponsors a variety of classes to provide stimulating and challenging opportunities to high ability students who are eager to explore subjects on an in-depth or fast-paced level, and to provide a supportive environment for academic and social interaction for students from preschool through high school. The staff was quite interested in expanding their programs to include hearing-impaired students, and an experimental program was set up during the summer of 1983 to include hearing-impaired students in Pegasus's Project Explore! UCI, which serves students entering the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. Project Explore! was selected because it is an academic and cultural enrichment program with courses designed to stimulate complex thinking and problem-solving behaviors in high-achieving, gifted, motivated, or capable under-achieving

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students, and this program seemed to meet the identified needs of an unserved segment of the hearing-impaired population.

Criteria

Pegasus Project for the Hearing-Impaired (PPHI) was offered to all incoming 6-9th grade hearing-impaired students who could demonstrate evidence of reading at grade level as measured by a standardized achievement test, and accompanied by a letter of recommendation from an authorized school personnel familiar with his/her school functioning ability.

Participants

Nine students enrolled in Pegasus Project for the Hearing-Impaired (PPHI) including seven students using total communication and two students using an oral/aural-only approach to communication of ages 11-15. Sixty-three hearing students entering grades 6-8 in the Fall of 1983 participated in Project Explore! Seven of the PPHI students lived in the local Orange County area and were transported daily by parents or carpool as were the hearing students. Two of the PPHI students lived outside the Orange County area and participated in the Host Family Program, staying with the family of one of the local hearing-impaired students.

Personnel

The staff serving PPHI included a Pegasus Programs' Director, a Site Administrator/Teacher for PPHI, a Sign Language Teacher, eleven of the regular Pegasus Teachers who had students mainstreamed in their courses, and five full/part-time sign language interpreters.

Program Description

Pegasus Project Explore! UCI including PPHI was a three-and-one-half week summer session operating from July 6-24, 1983, on the University of California, Irvine campus. Each of the 63 hearing students selected six courses of about 1½ hours in length. Courses offered included Computer Programming, Literature, Fine

Arts, Physical and Biological Sciences, Math Enrichment, and Sign Language. The hearing-impaired students selected four courses from the above offerings and all enrolled in a special class--Issues for the Hearing-Impaired--which met daily. This course was an opportunity for hearing-impaired students to explore deaf history, consider traits of productive deaf adults, and consider other relevant issues in the field of hearing impairment. All students were free to select those courses they desired, and interpreters were provided as needed. The Sign Language class and the Issues class met at the same time and joined together for the last 15 minutes of each period to provide one-to-one interaction between hearing-impaired and hearing students.

The day began with a 25-minute group opening session for all Project Explore! students and staff. A variety of involvement activities focused on bringing the group together and preparing them for the demands of their courses. These included exercise, stress and relaxation techniques, mind bogglers/teasers, and student sharing of various course content and activities. Two sessions were used to explain deafness to the hearing students and to have hearing-impaired student volunteers share their backgrounds and feelings about being hearing-impaired, and to answer questions from hearing students. The sign language class also did an end-of-course presentation demonstrating their manual communication skills.

Following morning exercises, students attended their first classes, had a short nutrition break, attended their 2nd and 3rd classes and then had lunch. During lunch time students were free to use the UCI snack bars and food machines at a variety of locations on campus as long as they followed the rule of staying in pairs at all times. This time was used voluntarily for the Sign Language class and any other interested students and the Issues class to share lunch together and increase their interactive communication. Students could also use the Library facilities and those students in computer programming could use time on computers

in the Lab. Following lunch, students attended their afternoon class and then met at a designated location for transportation home.

A final session end activity was a party for the Issues class and Sign Language class, which proved to be a truly integrated social experience.

Discussion/Evaluation

The consensus of Directors, Staff, Students, and Parents was that PPHI was a highly successful project. This assessment was noted in questionnaires, observations, and comments by persons working with and observing the program. Interaction and acceptance among the students was very good, with both hearing-impaired and hearing students reaching out to each other. Hearing-impaired students easily followed the interpreters in classes and morning activities, and participated equally with the hearing students. As one of the Pegasus teachers commented, "Although there is necessarily some time delay between voice and signing, the hearing-impaired students were involved in all class activities."

Only one of the Pegasus staff had had previous experience with hearing-impaired students in a mainstreaming situation. However, the other teachers were openly involved in a preparatory staff in-service training and a staff, parent, student in-service training on deafness given by the PPHI Site Administrator. Other information was provided on a one-to-one basis as needed throughout the 3½ week session.

The PPHI students rated almost all classes good, with the high-level involvement courses like Computer Programming, Chemistry, Mime, Architectural Drawing, and the Deaf Issues class receiving the highest ratings. Students felt challenged by the level of questioning utilized in courses, and by the problem-solving activities and projects presented.

The greatest weakness that was demonstrated by the PPHI students was in the area of written language. Although their English language abilities enabled them

to adequately follow and participate in fast-paced instruction and verbal discussions, reports and papers showed a continued need to emphasize written language skills. It is anticipated that this area will become a core part of the Deaf Issues Class in the future.

Summary

Pegasus Project for the Hearing-Impaired as a component of Pegasus Project Explore! UCI demonstrated that high-ability hearing-impaired students can successfully function with and benefit from the type of curriculum and teaching strategies used with high-ability hearing students. The intelligence that is demonstrated, the high levels of cognitive engagement with material, the creativity, and the developed language skills, all present a unique capability in a small segment of the hearing-impaired population that can best be met by people trained to work with gifted individuals in combination with those knowledgeable about hearing impairment. Pegasus' Project Explore! UCI with the PPHI component was able to meet the needs of this special population.

Working Paper presented

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